

VZCZCXRO5493

PP RUEHAG RUEHAST RUEHDA RUEHDBU RUEHDF RUEHFL RUEHIK RUEHKW RUEHLA
RUEHLN RUEHLZ RUEHROV RUEHSR RUEHVK RUEHYG
DE RUEHBW #1719/01 2931032
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 201032Z OCT 06
FM AMEMBASSY BELGRADE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9584
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC 1213
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUFOADA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK
RHMFISS/CDR USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE
RXFEAA/HQ AFSOUTH NAPLES IT
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 BELGRADE 001719

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958:N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [SR](#) [YI](#)

SUBJECT: EMBASSY BELGRADE'S GOTV CAMPAIGN

SUMMARY

1. (SBU) Embassy Belgrade has launched a comprehensive "Get Out The Vote" (GOTV) campaign for the likely imminent Serbian parliamentary and presidential elections. This campaign -- which relies heavily on NDI, IRI, and local NGOs -- will seek to combat voter apathy and frustration in an effort to bolster the democratic forces against the nationalist/extremist parties. The campaign consists primarily of a non-partisan effort that will intensify once election dates have been set. USG funds will also support a smaller effort (voter education and a parallel vote count) for the constitutional referendum on October 28th and 29th. End Summary.

Budget Breakdown

2. (SBU) The GOTV campaign is a multi-pronged effort providing non-partisan support to democratic parties combined with voter education and outreach through media and direct mailings. USAID has budgeted up to 2 million dollars for the effort with 1.4 million dollars split between the International Republic Institute (IRI) and the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and another 600,000 dollars allotted to the Institute for Sustainable Communities (ISC) for civil society and advocacy programs.

Pre-Election Activities by NDI and IRI

3. (SBU) NDI and IRI have already begun preparatory GOTV activities and have established a timeline with activities steadily increasing as the elections dates, once they are established, draw closer. Should elections occur in December, NDI and IRI efforts will accelerate swiftly once the dates are announced. The heart of these efforts will aim at recapturing the 600,000 plus democratic voters who became disenchanted with the process in the aftermath of Milosevic's ouster, as well as the burgeoning wake of disaffected democrats reflected in current polling. This will be achieved through a variety of pre-election activities, designed to connect with voters, including a non-partisan phone bank, non-partisan door to door and direct mail efforts, and training/technical assistance for the democratic parties in an effort to build their capacity at a local level. The phone bank will be conducted by a paid marketing firm and will survey voter opinions about important issues and participation; relevant information collected will then be shared with the parties. All activities will be done in accordance with Serbian election law, which prohibits direct financial or material assistance to political parties.

4. (SBU) As a supplement to NDI and IRI's regular programming assistance to all of the major parties, part of the GOTV effort will also be expanded to provide consultants to smaller pro-democratic parties who have identifiable constituencies, but lack the resources

to maximize their voice. The job of these consultants will be to advise leadership, coordinate campaign activities, and train activists. Assisted parties will include the Serbia Roma Union (URS), the Vojvodina Alliance of Hungarians (SVM), and the Sandzak Democratic Party (SnDP).

Referendum Complicates GOTV Efforts

15. (SBU) The Constitutional referendum could potentially complicate GOTV efforts. The agreement forged by Kostunica with all of the major parties on the Constitution was seen as circumventing public debate. Provisions on Kosovo supported by the Radical Party and vague and non-committal language on key issues has angered key democratic constituencies. Influential Democratic leaders in Vojvodina and several minority leaders have already called for a boycott. Meanwhile, the government has launched an aggressive and well-funded referendum campaign and stacked the electoral commission with Milosevic-era apparatchiks who are well-versed in "managing" an election. In the event of disputes about the fairness and transparency of the referendum, these could further undermine support for the larger democratic parties among regional democrats and minorities. The result could be particularly harmful to the DS, which would be tarred by its association with Radicals in support for breaking the rules in adopting the constitution.

ISC Activities and Parallel Vote Count

16. (SBU) We have set aside a small part of the GOTV funding for the Constitutional referendum. ISC is still in the process of finalizing its pre-election activities, which will involve voter education and an election awareness campaign through civil society and media efforts. Of the 600,000 dollars allotted to the organization, approximately 100,000 will be applied toward programs for the constitutional referendum, and the remaining 500,000 will be used for general elections. Regarding pre-referendum activities,

BELGRADE 00001719 002 OF 002

ISC has already approved funding (19,000 dollars) for CeSID, a domestic election-monitoring and polling NGO, to conduct a survey of voters' attitudes toward the new Constitution and likelihood of voter participation in the referendum. In addition, ISC will, along with other donors, support a partial parallel vote count (facilitated by CeSID). Details about cost-sharing are still being finalized, but ISC will likely contribute 50,000 dollars to this effort.

Embassy Role

17. (SBU) In addition to NDI/IRI and civil society components, the Ambassador will lead our overall embassy efforts to promote GOTV themes and reinforce outreach to various political parties. We will make it very clear in the run-up to the Constitutional referendum that we will support a fair and transparent democratic process and not refrain from speaking out against gross irregularities and improper practices.

GOTV Campaign Likely to Be an Uphill Battle

18. (SBU) Like the GOTV campaign for the 2004 Serbian presidential elections, the objective of the current campaign is to increase democratic turnout; however, this campaign is shaping up to be a far more difficult battle for the democrats and their voters. In 2004, efforts were more easily focused, concentrating on a few areas which contained a large density of democratic voters. Now, with the drop in democratic voter participation, it will be necessary to also focus our efforts in non-traditionally democratic voting areas. The Constitution could also complicate collaborative efforts among the larger democratic parties, who are supporting the Referendum, and the regional and minority parties, some of which are supporting a boycott.